

FACTSHEET

Veterinary Services

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter

Over 80,000 equines, mostly horses unfit or unsuitable for riding, are slaughtered humanely each year in the United States. For some time, there has been great concern about the way in which these animals are handled when transported from the auction terminal to the slaughtering facility.

Recognizing these concerns, Congress has charged the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with developing an oversight program for the transport of equines to slaughter. USDA has taken up this charge and prepared a proposed regulatory framework that addresses both the needs of equines and those of the transportation industry.

Congress' Charge

The Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, commonly known as the 1996 Farm Bill, authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to issue guidelines to regulate the commercial transportation of equines to slaughter by persons regularly engaged in that activity within the United States. The Secretary is authorized to regulate the food, water, and rest provided to such equines in transit; to require the segregation of stallions from other equines during transit; and to review other related issues the Secretary considers appropriate.

The Secretary is authorized to require any person to maintain such records and reports as are deemed necessary. The Secretary also is authorized to conduct investigations and inspections and to establish and strictly enforce civil penalties.

In a final rule published on December 31, 1996, the Secretary delegated the authority for administering these requirements to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

USDA's Initiatives

To meet Congress' charge to improve the care afforded to equines transported to slaughter, APHIS has undertaken the following initiatives:

- Convened a committee composed of its own internal experts plus representatives from the Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) and the Food Safety and Inspection Service to develop a meaningful, yet workable set of guidelines.
- Participated in two meetings called by the American Horse Council and the Animal Horse Protection Association. From these meetings, USDA was able to develop a strategy for implementing a proactive program to address all provisions contained in Congress' charge.
- Commissioned three research projects to study requirements for food and water, position of various types of equines within a conveyance, and behavior of stallions and aggressive mares in confinement. The research projects also examined the importance of segregating various breeds and the need for rest after more than 28 hours of confinement.
- Identified the need for an educational program and gained consensus regarding the program from the participants involved in developing and/or contributing to the proposed rule. The proposed program includes production of a training video, publication of a guidebook, and presentation of a series of educational workshops around the United States.

Overview of the Proposed Rule

The final initiative that APHIS undertook was the development of a proposed rule for the transport of equines to slaughter. Published for comment on May 19, 1999, the proposed rule calls for:

- Adherence to a feed and water schedule prior to shipping the equines;

- Issuance of USDA “backtags” to each equine in the shipment. Backtags are affixed to an animal as identification so that the animal can be traced back to its original owner;
- Completion of an owner/shipper certificate, including an authorized signature for each equine;
- Compliance with specific loading guidelines, which include allocating floor space and segregation of aggressive equines, such as stallions, from the rest of the animals;
- Education of personnel responsible for ensuring the care, safety, and welfare of each animal while in transit to the slaughtering facility;
- Inspection of animals and the transport trucks by qualified USDA authorities;
- Enforcement of specific requirements at the slaughtering facility by USDA officials, including inspection of the animals and the owner/shipper certificate.

How to Get a Copy of the Proposed Rule

The proposed rule was published in the Federal Register, Vol. 64, No. 96, May 19, 1999. APHIS accepted comments on the rule until July 19, and is reviewing all input received to determine how to proceed.

To request a copy of the rule, you may write to:

APHIS, PPD, Regulatory Analysis and Development
4700 River Road, Unit 118
Riverdale, MD 20737–2817

You may also visit APHIS' Website at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppd/rad/webrepor.html>, or write to or call the APHIS contacts listed below.

Additional Information

For additional information on this issue, contact the government/industry coordinator of the Commercial Transportation of Equines to Slaughter program:

Timothy Cordes
APHIS, VS, National Animal Health Programs
4700 River Road, Unit 43
Riverdale, MD 20737–1231
Phone: (301) 734–4363

or

Thomas M. Poerstel
APHIS, VS, National Animal Health Programs
4700 River Road, Unit 43
Riverdale, MD 20737–1231
Phone: (301) 734–4363

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